



Serenity, now!

If you've seen the Seinfeld episode, the title of this wellnote may have made you laugh. If you haven't seen the episode, you may still appreciate the humor in the seemingly demanding command. Either way, it's something most of us can relate to. We want to be calm and we want it to happen right away.

Life keeps us busy and when work and/or home demands are weighing heavy on us, it's easy to feel stressed. One key to "keeping it all together" is to notice your body's triggers and respond when you feel those triggers occurring. Maybe you begin to clench your jaw, perhaps your shoulders rise close to your ear lobes; you might even notice you're holding your breath. Whatever the trigger, pay attention and take action. It doesn't have to be heroic action, just a few deep breaths to signal your body to settle down.

You can try it now, if you're ready. Wherever you are reading this, take a moment and really tune into your breathing. When you inhale, try to let your belly fill with air. When you exhale, let the belly contract. Relax your jaw and let your mouth fall open slightly. Let your arms and hands feel heavy. Notice the fresh air you're taking in filling your torso and then think about stale air, stress and tension leaving your body with your exhale.

Slow, deeper breaths signal to our body that we are in a safe place (as opposed to a prehistoric time when there may be a saber-tooth tiger lurking around the next boulder) and that unnecessary muscle tightness can go away. It's not always instant, but with practice you'll begin to notice it happening and be able to tune in and help the process along.

Practice taking slow, deep breaths when you are stuck in traffic, in a tense meeting, on the phone, or any time you think about it. For more tips and suggestions, attend a CommonHealth **Relearn to Relax** program at your agency. Also visit our website at www.commonhealth.virginia.gov.

Source: Amy Moore and CommonHealth

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